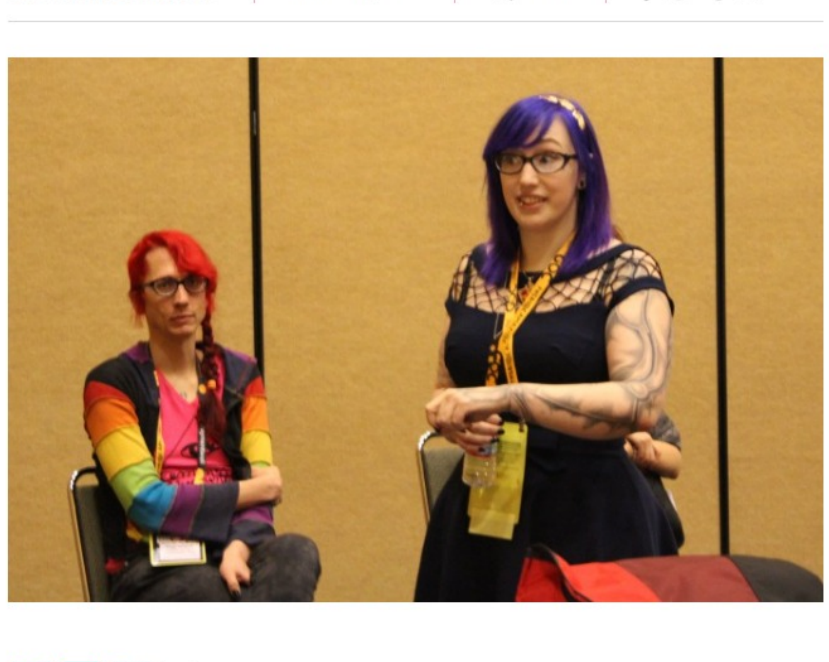
YOUR MIND

HOW A TORPEDOED KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN UNINTENTIONALLY REVEALED AN UNLIKELY UNIT OF CYBER-TERRORISTS

BY CANDACE OWENS | APRIL 18, 2016 | 529



I imagine it may have gone something like this:

Zoe Quinn sat down at her computer. She was scrolling through hashtags and retweets pertaining to the one issue upon which her notoriety and personal brand hinged to: Cyber-bullying.

Maybe she was twirling her hair, maybe she was drinking a coffee—maybe she was sitting a top her bed in sweatpants; the relevant point here of course if that she was logged onto the Internet.

Perhaps she saw it right there on twitter, with the hashtag #cyberbullying affixed to it. Perhaps one of her of her 73.2k followers messaged it to her, or perhaps it landed right on her feed, having been circulated by the very anti-bullying organizations that she followed. The relevant point here of course, is that she saw it.

A 2 1/2 minute video, of what she perceived to be an unintelligible group of young women talking excitedly about how they were going to "break the internet". *Literally.* A video, followed by a brief, Buzzfeed-like description laced with much-too obvious jokes and small jabs regarding women working in the field of technology.

The video had come from Kickstarter.Com—a crowdfunding platform, which by nomenclature suggests an early stage for any company. And yet it was enough to strike a nerve within Zoe.

A real one.

Maybe she sit spit out her coffee, perhaps she froze with a strand of hair still wrapped around her finger; the point here of course is that whatever she was doing, she had now stopped to pay full attention.

The facts of the matter are that Zoe Quinn then unleashed a twitter assault, an early, aggressive move against a company in which she really knew nothing about. To be precise, she released 22 back-to-back tweets aimed at the project, presenting her self as a former victim who *knew* that such a solution to end cyber-bullying could not work.

"Spreading people's abuse is quite often not at all what they want. Anything that is public facing at all has to be treated with privacy and onsent as the two biggest ethos or else it's crap", she wrote among many other things.

She received instant support and favoriting by the dozens.

But that wasn't what she wanted.

It wasn't what she wanted at all.

The day was just beginning to wind down. I hadn't slept the night prior, as the nerves of my very first Crowdfunding effort had begun taking a real toll. We were up about $2700.00 (not bad for our first 13 hours of fundraising), and our friends and family were promising to push even hardest for us the next day.

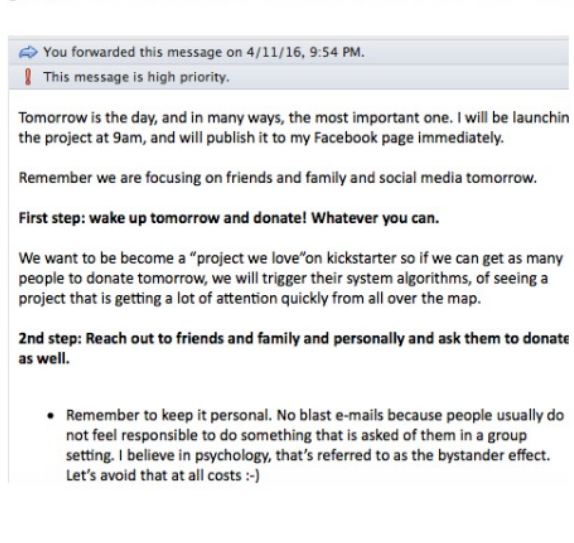
We had pulled together the campaign seamlessly. We were networked with other anti-bullying organizations beforehand and were happy to see that the Tyler Clementi Foundation was among the first to re-tweet our Kickstarter effort that morning. I had been emailing back and forth with them, as we wanted to make sure our campaign would simultaneously provide support to their Day1 organization– myself, a huge fan of their mission.

I was wearing the lack of sleep on my face, and had been hitting the refresh button on our campaign page every few minutes to watch the dollar amount rise.

Had we done enough? Could we do more? Ever the perfectionist, doubt had begun to rear it's ugly head.

Because we had switched the verbiage on our campaign last second, a decision I had made personally, to make it more digestible. I read an article entitled "Mistakes people make on kickstarter", the night prior and it had listed "not knowing the kickstarter community" as one of them. It described the kickstarter community as "fun" and advised using humor which made me second guess the direction of ours. I felt the subject matter of the video was a bit heavy (we were talking about children commiting suicide for god's sake), and it was therefore unnecessary to hold the description beneath the video in the same regard.

Plus, we had strategized and had suspected we could raise the amount ($75,000) amongst our large circle of friends and family. Our focus was to extend our reach through them, and hit our goal through the networks that they existed in. We were extremely organized, and we had mapped out a day-by-day blueprint. Here is an excerpt from the e-mail I circulated to a group of individuals and potential investors who had been involved in our project from day 1:



You forwarded this message on 4/11/16, 9:54 PM.

This message is high priority.

Tomorrow is the day, and in many ways, the most important one. I will be launchin the project at 9am, and will publish it to my Facebook page immediately.

Remember we are focusing on friends and family and social media tomorrow.

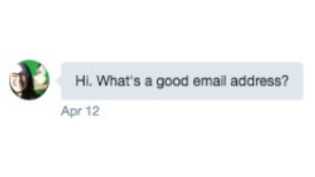
First step: wake up tomorrow and donate! Whatever you can.

We want to be become a "project we love"on kickstarter so if we can get as many people to donate tomorrow, we will trigger their system algorithms, of seeing a project that is getting a lot of attention quickly from all over the map.

2nd step: Reach out to friends and family and personally and ask them to donate as well.

- Remember to keep it personal. No blast e-mails because people usually do not feel responsible to do something that is asked of them in a group setting. I believe in psychology, that's referred to as the bystander effect. Let's avoid that at all costs :-)

By all accounts that evening, our plan had worked. My co-worker called me around 7:30pm to inform me that we had been contacted via the Degree180 twitter handle. She said someone was asking how she could reach out to us to discuss the project:



Hi. What's a good email address?

Apr 12

I should have investigated further but I didn't. I considered this twitter request to be no different than any of the individuals that were reaching out to us via kickstarter directly, asking us to clarify certain aspects of our campaign.

Someone wanted to know more about our company? No problem.

"Give her my direct e-mail" I replied.

When Zoe Quinn e-mailed me at 8:33pm, she began with her credentials. She described herself as the:

"co-founder of Crash Override Network, one of the only online abuse helplines and victims advocacy groups. I'm also patient zero of GamerGate, which I will assume you're familiar with given your line of work."

Bad assumption.

I had never heard her name in my entire life, and hadn't the slightest inclination as to who, or what Gamergate was.

Call me old fashioned, but I live outside of the virtual world and have had to make a living outside of my television set. I had spent the prior 4 years of my life working on Wall street and can lay slaughter to the myth that the city never sleeps; It does—it's just people *in it* that don't. In 2015 I had pivoted to the idea of starting my own company, to help be a part of the change that I feel our world needs to make.

I am a conscious capitalist. This was a term pegged by John Mackey (my idol) the founder of Whole Foods, and perpetuated by his old college roommate (Jeff Tindell) who just so happens to own the Container Store. Simply put it is the reimagination of capitalism as "a new system for doing business grounded in a more evolved ethical consciousness". It's an understanding that "making money" and "doing good", need'nt exist as exclusives of one another. It is something I was ripe to partake in, most especially after having witnessed firsthand the innerworkings of the world of finance, (although to it, I owe the person that I am today).

My idea was big and little at the same time. I wanted to put an end to the era of internet thugging. It is something I've genuinely never understood— how people so recklessly utilize the web to invoke terror upon others. I had examined the correlation between the rising rate of suicides in teenagers over the years, and knew that, (even it was never going to be explicitly stated) the age of social media had contributed significantly to its dark rise.

I had experienced it myself when I was in high school 10 years earlier. All we had was Facebook, but the writing was on the wall even then. I was involved in an incident that was labeled a "hate crime", and exposed as a victim to just how awful the cyber world could be, for both the victims *and* the accused.

So when Zoe introduced herself to me that night, I was somewhat embarrassed that I had missed a scandal which she so pompously *assumed* I must know, given my campaign.

I did what any person does in such a pressed circumstance; I raced to Wikipedia, pulled up the story and did my best to play catch up.

I didn't think I had to dig deeper then the first couple of sentences, really. I gathered she was a victim of severe cyber-bullying due to a crappy boyfriend and national press, and I immediately looked upon her sympathetically.

She continued:

"I came across your Kickstarter today and I would very much like to speak to you about it. Or rather, I would like to talk you out of it based on what I know from over a year and a half of being a leading voice in the discussion around solving online abuse. I'm assuming you're coming from a place of good faith with trying to fix the issue of online abuse, and I'd like to ask you to assume I am as well given my expertise in the subject"

I thought this portion was weird. Because of all of the anti-bullying communities that we had networked with and reached out to, none had approached us with such an attitude. Questions initially? Sure. But stating an intention to "talk us out" of our company? That takes a certain amount of ego.

Nonetheless, I agreed to speak with her over the phone. I was anticipating a very short discussion between two people that were in the same camp. I expected to address her concerns, and answer them in ways that would lessen her anxiety. I also thought I would expand SocialAutopsy's network of anti-bullying supporters.

I normally keep the grass cut low. The business of finance had properly exposed to me to the idea of snakes, and I had taken away from it the ability to spot one out from a mile away. But Zoe was a victim, and managed to slide past my defenses easily. My guard was fully down when she phoned me at 9:50pm, from a Hawaii number.

At best, the conversation I had with her was weird. At worst, it was unstable.

She began normally by again stating her credentials and telling me that I was making a huge mistake. She informed me she spoke on behalf of all of the agencies and organizations that she worked with and told me that they had contacted her because they were concerned.

They were concerned that minors would be doxxed.

Interesting. That was first time we had heard that term in our campaign: *"doxxed"*.

And I'm not referring to the kickstarter campaign that we were currently 12 hours into. We had actually shared our company story and intention with the world when it graced the front pages of all Connecticut newspapers six weeks earlier. It had been six weeks since the two articles had been published, and we had been e-mailed and facebooked with questions many times over. In fact, we had decided to put together a short FAQ video as a result, which we threw on our splash page at the time to tackle some of the more immediate concerns. While the question pertaining to "minors" had come up during that earlier time. The "doxxing" word (a slang term) had not.

Not once, ever, in the six weeks of initial feedback from many communities and organizations, had we heard the word "dox".

That aside, I was happy to answer her question because I was ready for it.

I told her that we never publish the addresses or telephone numbers of any individual, only the information that they have *already* published onto their linked-in pages or public profiles. (Schools they attended, Jobs, etc). I told her that regarding minors, it was something that I felt strongly we had to include them in—but that she needn't worry because we had not a single minor in our database to date.

To clarify, I built this database with minors in mind. They are the ones I care about most deeply as any person who knows me will confirm. I did not come from a rich family. I had to take out loans to go to college, and work almost full-time throughout school to support myself. I chose to do that through nannying. So for 4 years of college and a year after college in NY, I made a career working with children.

Me, 2 months ago. Spending time with the children I babysat when they were toddlers.

It is the best job I've ever had, and I consider every single child that I have cared for over the years to be family members to me. I have learned from children that everyone is born good and incredibly certain of who they are; it is the world that strips that sense of self away over time.

It is incredibly difficult being a child, much less with the added saga of bullying that platforms like twitter, facebook, and instagram provide. I remember myself as a child that was way too thin, with fried hair, and having been made fun of for having no boobs (still don't). I was lucky I didn't have to go home and read the same criticisms of myself that I already harbored within my own mind. I can't imagine feeling the echo of such words existing within the perpetuity of the internet.

Prior to launching our Kickstarter, I had met with high schools, teachers and parents throughout the state of Connecticut who had seen my article and wanted to get involved. People from all over the spectrum; even those involved in the aftermath of the horrific Newtown shootings, who were now devoting their lives in support of children. They all agreed that cyber-bullying is one of the biggest issues they face today, and coming up with solutions to combat it had proven difficult over the years.

The working idea was that we might be able to infiltrate their consciousness at a young age to understand the weight of the internet (hey kids! what you say can *actually* last forever). By holding their words on our database for a few (weeks? months?—we hadn't decided anything yet)— then this sordid fact would register at a young age, and they wouldn't make the same mistakes as an adult. **Our mission was to stop the cycle**, and you can only do that by affecting a young generation.

Children think about short term goals (scholarships, making sports team, etc) right? We had imagined that if organizations could sign up for SocialAutopsy and tell these young adults that they did "social background checks" on all of their students, students might think twice before hitting the enter button.

Our network LOVED the idea.

We weren't so quick to assume that everyone in the world would though, so we knew that we first had to launch and actually EXIST first. As a database dedicated to adults, so that parents would see it and get an understanding for how effective it might be for children.

So to Zoe, I explained that the question of minors was a non-issue. It was something that didn't even need to be discussed as it was a way-down-the-line consideration.

Zoe then pivoted her argument and told me that she was concerned that the bullies would wind up being harassed by self-proclaimed vigilantes.

Had heard that one 4 times that day alone, via backers on our kickstarter page and had answered it without any push back.

I explained to her in depth our database. I explained to her that since it was pictorial-driven, you couldn't search by keyword (#Britney Spears) and expect all of the people to come up who had said something against her. I explained to her that you could only search by a real first and last name, so if a person wanted to discover who "John Doe" was on twitter, our database would be useless to them. Because the screenshot would say John Doe, but that image would be registered under the *real* user's name. In essence, you'd have to know who you were looking for, and if you already knew their first and last name, you could head to their social media pages regardless of us.

I felt confident in my answer because we had realized that potential flaw early on. When we first hatched the idea, I had an off-site web developer who had helped us to build Degree180.com, draw up a mock of how the website might function. He did it quickly—in about 10 days if I recall—before sending me a link that would allow us to go in and add profiles of people so that we could see all of the potential flaws in our design. We added about 100 or so profiles and sent around the not-live link to a close group of friends and relevant parties for feedback.

I explained this to Zoe.

Her next point was about legalities.

I didn't even understand her point about legal concerns, because what we do is common-sense legal. If a person has on their public linked-in and Facebook accounts that they work at Trader Joe's, why the hell would they be upset that a third party site knew that they worked at Trader Joe's?

Even more, why on earth would a "doxxer" come to our database to find that information when it's in plain site on the person's *other* profiles? I genuinely wasn't clear on her concern, but stressed to her that we had already asked lawyers (of course) regarding what falls under public use: the answer is, mostly anything you can find on the internet published by the users themselves.

Turns out the internet is public.

Also, we had contacted Facebook's legal team to garner a better understanding of their privacy guidelines, before we sank thousands of dollars into building the *real* database. Plus, on our kickstarter campaign we had explained that we would be in need of more legal support, so wasn't it much too early for this line of questioning regarding an un-launched database?

Zoe was growing frustrated with my failure to understand what she was failing to understand.

I thought I could earn her support by explaining to her that we were focused on threats—the kind of people that threaten to put a bullet in the back of someone's head and rape their children because they disagree with their political opinions. In my estimation, such words belong to a parasitic community, a group that I do not at all fret when people ask "how could you create something that could potentially destroy their livelihood"?

Because how exactly do those people think such words don't destroy the livelihood of the person those words are launched against? Have you ever been threatened to be killed or raped repeatedly, by an unknown harasser?

Zoe disagreed with me, and here is where it got weird.

She told me that she KNEW those people were not bad people. That she herself had been a part of the online group Anonymous, and that it was really just "something they did". She explained that she would never want the people that harassed her listed anywhere, and that she knew the first and last name of some of them, and yet had never reported them.

What?

I grew silent. I didn't know what to say to someone telling me that they thought such internet aggression was light fun.I told her I appreciated the feedback and that she had given us an idea. That maybe we should let celebrities and victims opt out somehow if they knew their attackers. It felt like a good way to end the conversation positively.

She reiterated to me her credentials, and said I ought to listen to her because of them and that she didn't want to go back to the anti-bullying organizations that had reached out to her with concerns with the current answers I was giving her.

I asked her to name which organizations, and she did not. I offered to have her put me in touch with them directly, and she declined.

This is about the point when my red flags started waving back and forth, wildly. I had been in the weeds with anti-bullying organizations and I knew it was highly unlikely that they would send a third party person to speak with us on their behalf.

We are all a part of the same initiative and want to help one another get there. There is absolutely no need to hide behind a third party spokesperson if you have any legitimate concerns.

She switched her tactic, once again, telling me that I did not know who I was messing with. She warned me that Gamergate (the community) would come after me and that they would be ruthless. She warned me that they would try to end my Kickstarter campaign, put me through cyber-hell, and that it wasn't an experience I wanted to live through as she had.

It is very important to note that Zoe Quinn told me that Gamergate would try to end my Kickstarter campaign.

Again, I had no idea who or what Gamergate was, but I assured her I was ready to embrace their backlash. Of course, one cannot expect to end cyber-bullying without some sort of cyber-revolt against us, and I was confident we would be ready when the time came.

She then grew hysterical, claiming that it wasn't enough. That she wanted me to put a stake in the project altogether, never bringing it to launch.

This part was practically insane to me; the fact that she thought that with a simple phone call, I would drop something that I had sank thousands of dollars of personal investment and hard work into, just because Zoe Quinn said so. Her suggestion was ego-maniacal.

I told her firmly and with as much respect that I could muster at that point that we were going to have to agree to disagree; that I was not dropping the project nor was I clear on what it was exactly that had her so riled up, emotionally.

We had reached a point of no return here. She was beyond emotional, and I was (aside from confused), aware that she and I would never see eye to eye. I told her that I hoped that when we launched, she would see the value in the technology. At which point she broke into tears and exclaimed:

"By then it will be too late, it'll ruin everything".

With that, and after 43 minutes of erratic conversation, she hung up the phone on me.

I imagine that Zoe Quinn was devastated.

I imagine she had collapsed onto the floor of her bedroom in hysterics, maybe even punching a pillow in frustration on the way down; the point here of course, is that her plan to effectively shut down SocialAutopsy.com with flexed credentials and a pompous attitude had done nothing to shake it's founder.

And so something had to be done.

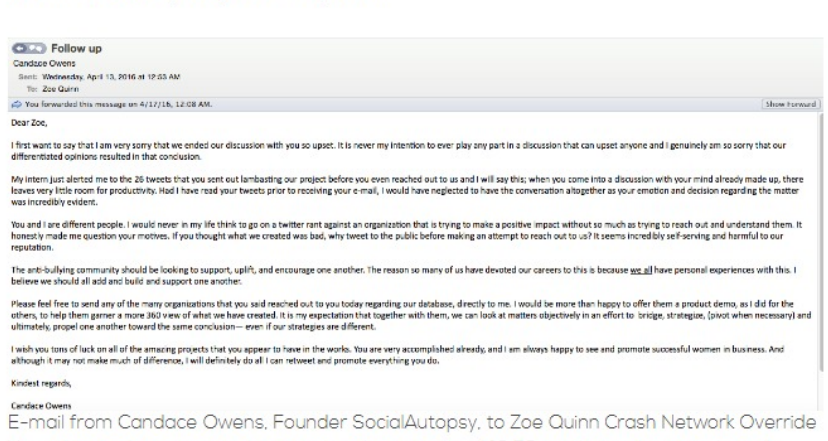
Mentally, I couldn't establish what had just transpired. A person who I thought was an obvious ally, had flown into a raging fit against me.

I called a close friend and recounted the situation. I told him:

"either she is severely stockholmed, or she herself is a troll. No questions about it".

I didn't expect to do anything with those suspicions of course because we were still in the early midst of our campaign; a campaign that I had spent a month prepping for.

I instead waited (about an hour or so), and then resolved to send her a nice follow up e-mail, so that I could completely reshift my focus:



Follow up

Candace Owens

Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2016 at 12:53 AM

To: Zoe Quinn

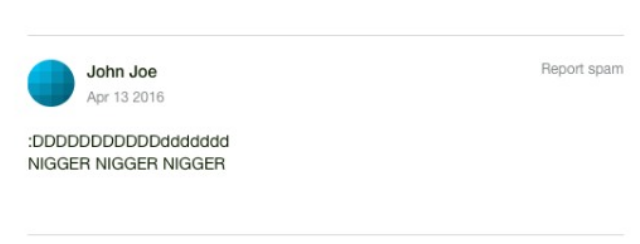
Dear Zoe,

E-mail from Candace Owens, Founder SocialAutopsy, to Zoe Quinn Crash Network Override

You will note that my e-mail went out to her at around 12:53am that night, or technically, morning. I did not receive any response from her, and I myself didn't wind up making it to bed until around 4am.

That's not because I couldn't sleep, but because suddenly, my project took a nose dive.

A mere 45 minutes after I had sent that e-mail out to Zoe, it began, with a message from "John Joe" via our Kickstarter page.



John Joe

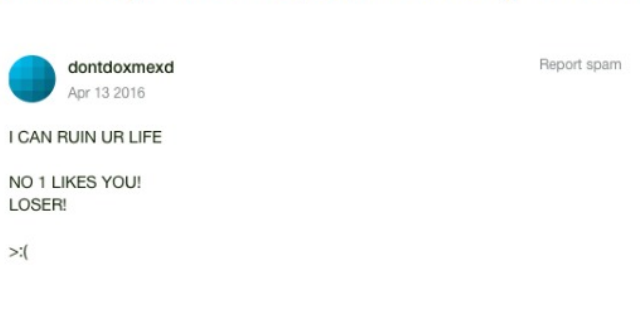
Apr 13 2016

Report spam

:DDDDDDDDDDDdddddd

NIGGER NIGGER NIGGER

And the onslaught continued nearly every 10 minutes straight into the morning after that:



dontdoxmexd

Apr 13 2016

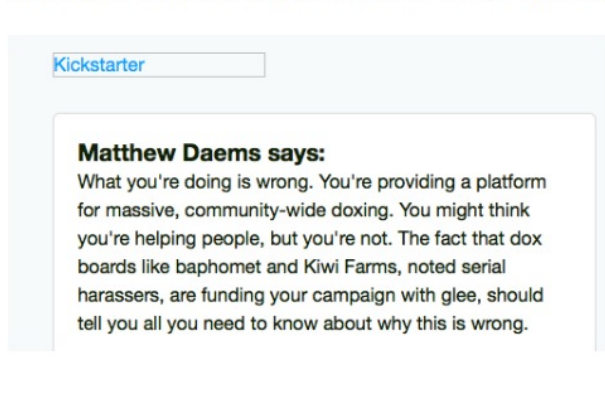
Report spam

I CAN RUIN UR LIFE

NO 1 LIKES YOU!
LOSER!

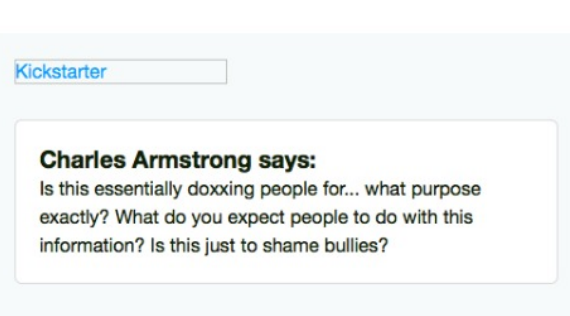
>:(

Interesting account name, no? Because there was that word that we had never heard before again: "dox". And we began seeing it over and over again, rapidly.



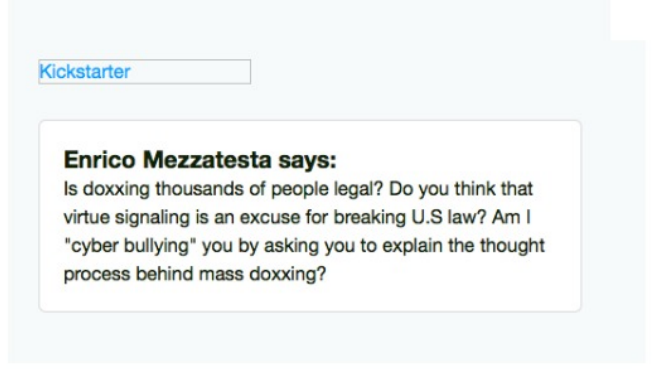
Kickstarter

Matthew Daems says:
What you're doing is wrong. You're providing a platform for massive, community-wide doxing. You might think you're helping people, but you're not. The fact that dox boards like baphomet and Kiwi Farms, noted serial harassers, are funding your campaign with glee, should tell you all you need to know about why this is wrong.



Kickstarter

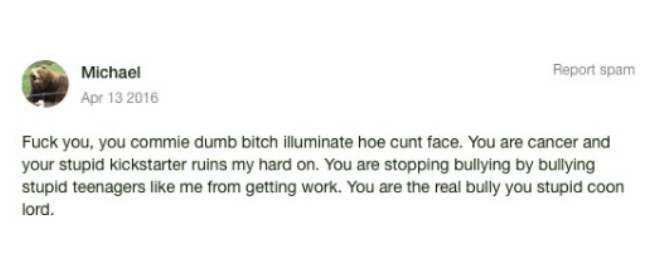
Charles Armstrong says:
Is this essentially doxxing people for... what purpose exactly? What do you expect people to do with this information? Is this just to shame bullies?



Kickstarter

Enrico Mezzatesta says:
Is doxxing thousands of people legal? Do you think that virtue signaling is an excuse for breaking U.S law? Am I "cyber bullying" you by asking you to explain the thought process behind mass doxxing?

Suddenly, our campaign had shifted from a positive one with plenty of support and feedback, to an ugly one with menacing threats. We were shocked by the anger being expressed in all of the messages:



Michael

Apr 13 2016

Report spam

Fuck you, you commie dumb bitch illuminate hoe cunt face. You are cancer and your stupid kickstarter ruins my hard on. You are stopping bullying by bullying stupid teenagers like me from getting work. You are the real bully you stupid coon lord.

The messages poured in with words that floated between misogyny and racism– and all came from, you guessed it, men. On our website, we were also being hit with feigned e-mail subscriptions with entries that were misogynistic and racist at the exact same time, like this one:

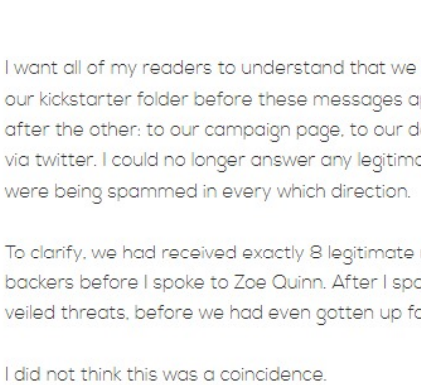
deserved rape

I want all of my readers to understand that we had not received a single item of spam to our kickstarter folder before these messages appeared, and now they were flooding in, one after the other: to our campaign page, to our degree180 accounts, and yup, you guessed it– via twitter. I could no longer answer any legitimate concerns to our backers because we were being spammed in every which direction.

To clarify, we had received exactly 8 legitimate messages to our kickstarter account from backers before I spoke to Zoe Quinn. After I spoke to her, we had received about 52 of veiled threats, before we had even gotten up for breakfast the next day.

I did not think this was a coincidence.

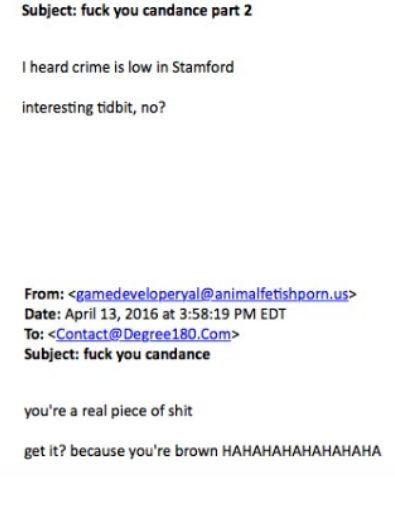
Men, Misogyny, and Gaming. Retrospectively, that was the one thing that was apparent in every single message I received, even down to the e-mail addresses used.



From: <gamedeveloperyal@animalfetishporn.us>
Date: April 13, 2016 at 3:59:27 PM EDT
To: <Contact@Degree180.Com>
Subject: fuck you candance part 2

I heard crime is low in Stamford

interesting tidbit, no?



From: <gamedeveloperyal@animalfetishporn.us>
Date: April 13, 2016 at 3:58:19 PM EDT
To: <Contact@Degree180.Com>
Subject: fuck you candance

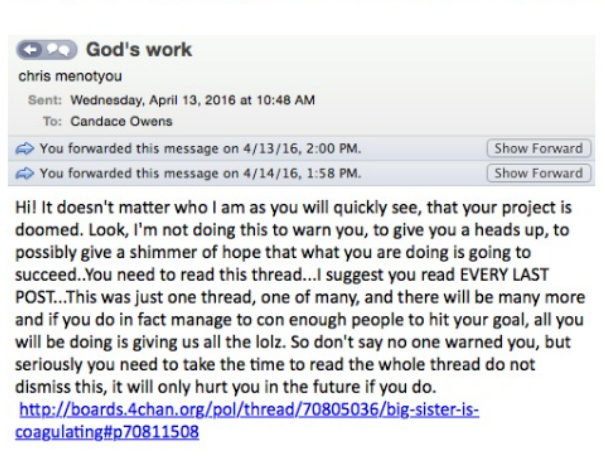
you're a real piece of shit

get it? because you're brown HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

Is it a coincidence? That everything Zoe feared for us happened within hours of her warning me it might? Is it also a coincidence that after 5 weeks of campaining and promotion that the fear that was suddenly being expressed was that minors would be "doxxed"?

My initial suspicion was that Zoe perhaps tipped the gaming community off and they were now coming down on us: hard.

However I exited that suspicion when I received this anonymous e-mail that morning, alerting me of a 4chan.org planned attack to debunk our kickstarter efforts:



God's work

chris menotyou

Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2016 at 10:48 AM

To: Candace Owens

You forwarded this message on 4/13/16, 2:00 PM. Show Forward

You forwarded this message on 4/14/16, 1:58 PM. Show Forward

Hi! It doesn't matter who I am as you will quickly see, that your project is doomed. Look, I'm not doing this to warn you, to give you a heads up, to possibly give a shimmer of hope that what you are doing is going to succeed..You need to read this thread...I suggest you read EVERY LAST POST...This was just one thread, one of many, and there will be many more and if you do in fact manage to con enough people to hit your goal, all you will be doing is giving us all the lolz. So don't say no one warned you, but seriously you need to take the time to read the whole thread do not dismiss this, it will only hurt you in the future if you do.
http://boards.4chan.org/pol/thread/70805036/big-sister-is-coagulating#p70811508

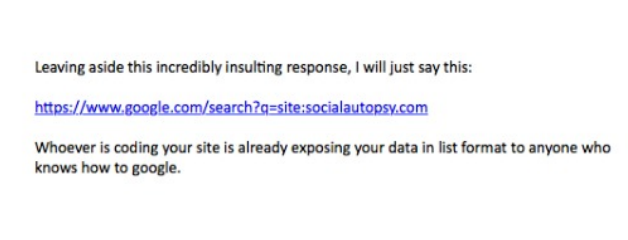
It was another male. He was tipping me off, and simultaneously threatening me against continuing our campaign. He said he "wasn't doing it to warn [me]", and yet clearly, "he" was. But that wasn't what stood out to me.

What stood out to me was the fact that this e-mail came in to my personal e-mail address. It was not directed to us via kickstarter (which is the most sensible way to contact us if you have real concerns), nor did it come in to us through many of the other highly publicized Degree180 and SocialAutopsy contact accounts. This came in through to my e-mail, the address of which I had only given to Zoe Quinn when she reached out to me via twitter.

My personal e-mail was then signed up for two porn sites, again odd, considering guessing my e-mail address would be an unnatural route for any person to take given the publicity of our campaign.

This was not a coincidence at all in my estimation: She had slipped up.

Zoe e-mailed me a response to my follow up e-mail shortly thereafter at 1:09pm. She was writing to warn me that my earlier site had been googled and alluded to the fact that this was evidence that our site was not developped in an expert way. She wrote:



Leaving aside this incredibly insulting response, I will just say this:

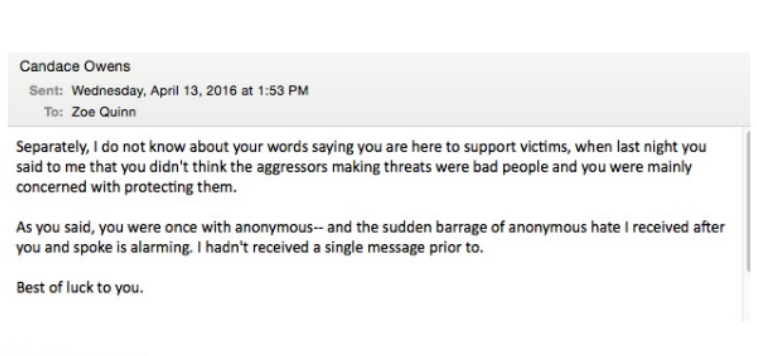
https://www.google.com/search?q=site:socialautopsy.com

Whoever is coding your site is already exposing your data in list format to anyone who knows how to google.

There it was. The months earlier mock site which we had used as a rough draft to internally assess our design flaws. I was confused, because we never brought that site live, but I understood the implications; she was going to push this out, and people were going to say they had uncovered our *actual* site, as evidence that what we built was technologically flawed.

And within minutes, we saw it being circulated on twitter.

I hit back, HARD in my e-mail back to her. I suddenly understood that she was at the center of trying to smear our reputation but I didn't understand why:



Candace Owens

Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2016 at 1:53 PM

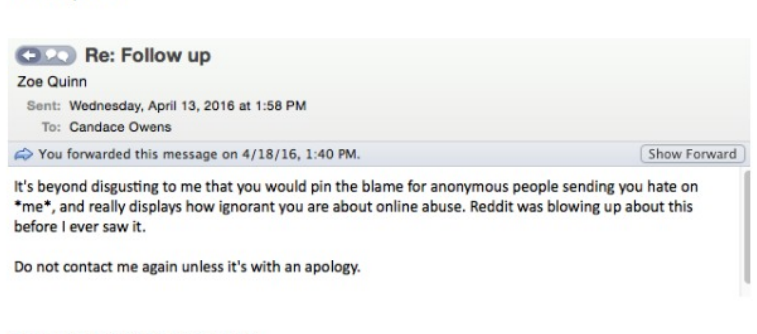
To: Zoe Quinn

Separately, I do not know about your words saying you are here to support victims, when last night you said to me that you didn't think the aggressors making threats were bad people and you were mainly concerned with protecting them.

As you said, you were once with anonymous— and the sudden barrage of anonymous hate I received after you and spoke is alarming. I hadn't received a single message prior to.

Best of luck to you.

Her response?:



Re: Follow up

Zoe Quinn

Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2016 at 1:58 PM

To: Candace Owens

You forwarded this message on 4/18/16, 1:40 PM. Show Forward

It's beyond disgusting to me that you would pin the blame for anonymous people sending you hate on *me*, and really displays how ignorant you are about online abuse. Reddit was blowing up about this before I ever saw it.

Do not contact me again unless it's with an apology.

Don't hold your breath, bitch.

I had directed a twitter rant earlier that day to the #Gamergate community, using the appropriate hashtag. I felt I was under attack by them, and knew Zoe had tipped them off. I was trying desperately to get people to understand that my company wasn't bad, these people were; Zoe for intiating it, and Gamergate for fighting the battle for her with full force.

Our twitter account was exploding still, now being mentioned about every 3 seconds. The rumor was that we were creating a site that would "dox" minors. They were tweeting at parenting organizations, at the FBI, at anyone who would listen to the fact that SocialAutopsy was committing a crime. They were retweeting and sharing facts as though they had been spoken from God himself.

And everything they were saying was a lie.

Since Zoe had alerted me to both the reddit (and presumedly the 4chan) feeds, I was now given a front row seat to the plan that was being devised to take us down. They had announced that we were, again "doxxing minors" and that if they all e-mailed Kickstarter they could have our campaign taken down.

And they did so, successfully.

I had alerted kickstarter to their plan and the e-mail chain, and they responded in kind which was reassuring, but hours later, we had learned that they had caved.

Less than 48 hours on Kickstarter, and for certain, we had somehow managed to go viral— but this was an odd instance of viral. We had gone viral within the very niche community of gaming, to which, we had no prior interest or connection to. That isn't how viral works. In fact, we were viral *only* within the gamer community. It had somehow been contained, and the lies were growing more and more aggressive with personal shots taken at my character.

I was labeled a femi-nazi, which really? Had no one read my articles regarding how I hated feminism for the sake of feminism, and lambasting the #freekesha campaign?

I was photoshopped to appear anti-Semitic, although I had written once about the Jewish man I once dated, quite favorably. I was labeled a pedophile-supporter, an idiot, you name-it. It was vicious.

I knew of course that I was at the center of an effective smear campaign—against a database that hadn't even launched.

The smoking gun.

Confession: I have no idea who Randi Lee Harper is. I saw that she was in my twitter mentions, but didn't think to take the time to examine why a group of trolls kept wanting to shove her down my throat, in a positive light.

Double confession: I have no interest in discovering who Randi Lee Harper is, and still have no intention of looking her up or speaking with her, ever.

My boyfriend caught wind of a post from The Ralph Retort, that he labeled "fair", which was a breath of fresh air from the vermin-like journalistic endeavors that we had seen being exercised thus far. Ralph's post included excerpts from an open letter written by Harper, which can only be described as a diatribe against Candace Owens and socialautopsy.com.

She of course began with her resume, which similar to her cohort Ms. Quinn, read like something from someone who thought they were on the fast track to become Oprah. The only difference is, she explained *why* she was listing her exhaustive qualifications:

"I'm telling you my credentials so you can understand where I'm coming from when I tell you, unequivocally, you are a goddamn trainwreck"

She continued her elementary style of writing, and teenaged like inflammatory language with a brave "You are a fucking idiot. So, gloves off. I'm going to tell you now why your idea is shit."

No, really. That's a direct quote, and not from any of the children under the age of ten that I once babysat. Yes, it is ironic that within this writing capacity she somehow felt empowered enough to take swipes at my professionalism and intelligence. And yes it is ironic that she proclaims she is a feminist.

It is both ironic, and borderline delusional. Indicative of someone who has begun to believe in her own infallibility.

Her crappy writing isn't what warranted my attention, though (I was an English/Journalism major in college, and have therefore seen many examples of such writing; teetering frequently between poor grammar, and childishness).

What caught my attention was this line,

"You blamed your Kickstarter getting shut down on trolls. You're wrong. That was [Zoe and I]."

It was that one little sentence, that one little line that locked everything into place for me, instantly.

Because Randi Lee Harper was making an appeal to the Gamergate community with it. She was, in one little sentence playing the martyr. She wanted them to believe that she and Zoe didn't understand my twitter outrage against them, and that they were happy to admit that it was actually them.

Her and Zoe had coordinated poorly there. Because Zoe had called me warning me against Gamergate and telling me they were going to try to end our campaign. Zoe was the one dropping breadcrumbs for me to see exactly what "Gamergate's" plans were to do so. It became very apparent to me, that they were playing both sides.

I suddenly began to wonder *why.*

Why did our kickstarter campaign get so viciously attacked after 12 hours? Why had it gone viral within just one community? Why were we on reddit, blogs, 4chan, being tweeted every 3 seconds, receiving hate mail, threats, and spam from every direction? Why had someone taken the time to photoshop my face beside a swastika? Why had someone opened a counterfeit Twitter account pretending to be me? Why had they started a change.org petition? Why had they inundated kickstarter with e-mails, and why was Randi Harper now penning a piece that was 2,567 words long?

It was *a lot* for 24 hours. It was too much, in fact.

One of our twitter followers may have said it best when he offered that "effort takes so much... effort".

It was our campaigns first 24 hours, and yet all of this had transpired. These people (all anonymous I should mention) were not just voicing their opinions, they were spending hours and hours of dedicated time ensuring that the public knew how awful I was and that I had to be stopped by any means. It was not only cyber harassment, it was a form of terrorism.

The Why:

Randi Harper and Zoe Quinn had discussed my project with one another. Regarding that, there can be no question.

They thought they could get me to pull the project down by beefing up their respective resumes, and with one phone call from "patient zero" of Gamergate.

When that didn't work, the two of them launched an effort of cyber-terrorism. When I began suspecting as much, I created a list of all of the twitter names we had seen tweeting at us aggressively from the start. They were all anonymous and they were all retweeting one another, to make it appear as though they had all agreed and that the conclusion was unanimous regarding Social Autopsy; they were trying to appear bigger than they actually were.

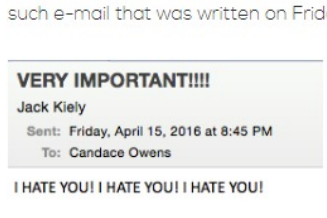
And these initial accounts were connected by one thing and one thing only; effort. Early effort. And a lot of it. One account @withmetta, even took it upon herself to write a blog piece regarding socialautopsy on Hubpages. It was the first blog that anonymous user had ever written on Hubpages.

Other affiliated accounts tried to point out to me (a bit too conspicuously) that they *hated* certain other accounts, but hey "even [they] agree that your idea is terrible because it would doxx minors".

I bet they did agree.

So I launched a plan to test my theory, because I knew that anything that had happened before would be considered "coincidental".

Our kickstarter had been shut down and yet we were still receiving e-mailed threats about our database, since we hadn't backed down from launching it. This time the threats were going to bloggers of Degree180.com and to our respective contact accounts. Here is one such e-mail that was written on Friday April 15th, 8:45pm:



VERY IMPORTANT!!!!

Jack Kiely

Sent: Friday, April 15, 2016 at 8:45 PM

To: Candace Owens

I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!

From Jack, of course. Another guy. By then I read the multiple stories about how Randi and Zoe had made their money off of abuse from men. I had read specific examples regarding other women they had harassed and taken down, and about how they themselves had been accused of doxxing. Former victims contacted me (with their real names), and provided me with examples of their DNA: racism, misogyny, gamergate, troll accounts: a cocktail for success.

Back to my plan:

Shortly after receiving this e-mail from "Jack" I announced on Twitter that I would be releasing all of the e-mails; that I would be going on the Ralph Retort webcast with my suspicions that Zoe Quinn was behind the cyber attacks. I ranted that I thought she was behind **all of the e-mail attacks** we had received and that this time, to quote her cohort, "the gloves were off". I announced that I had e-mails and evidence and that I would be speaking out. I focused purposely on the fact that I had e-mails.

My plan worked: the emails magically stopped. They stopped cold turkey. As I sit wring this today, we have gone an entire weekend without receiving so much as one e-mailed threat.

Still think that's a coincidence? A total inundation and then a total sudden stop?

No, that is the sloppy work of Zoe Quinn.

The why:

It's interesting, and really something I had never considered. Just how much power you could wield if you devoted yourself to creating a cyber unit. Even if it was just you and 20 other people involved, each with multiple fake accounts.

If a blog piece was written about you, you could all inundate beneath it and write criticisms shifting the landscape of the other people's thoughts. (Just watch what happens beneath this one).

If a company was coming out, and said in their crowdfunding video "what we are doing is figuratively lifting the masks off of trolls" you could inundate Kickstarter with e-mail complaints about minors and make them believe they were in involved in something dirty.

What you could do is control people's perception. What is the valuation of that?

You could feign friends, feign your own support, and exaggerate your own presence and significance. Yes, if you were willing to spend full time dedicated to the web, you could begin to distort reality by presenting an *assumed* majority.

A false, assumed majority, that goes back and fourth on a 4chan thread. A false, assumed majority, that hits the internet writing as many awful things about Candace Owens and her technically not-yet-founded company SocialAutopsy, before they even get an opportunity to launch. An effort to deter investors, supporters, and the general public; an effort to control what lives and dies.

A false, assumed majority, that upvotes or downvotes whenever and whatever they see fit. They could contact the media via twitter for instance, via a simple method of false inundation. Because who isn't going to jump when their Twitter mentions go from a sluggish, every 15 minutes, down to every 5 seconds all pertaining to the same issue? Who isn't going read the common opinion, manipulated perhaps by what an *assumed* majority is saying about an issue?

"Oh this is terrible, I feel so bad" [insert whatever link here]

You could create different personnas, thereby infiltrating certain communities. And if a company like SocialAutopsy developed a technology to unmask you?

...It would ruin everything. Literally.

The implications here are as vast as they are ugly. In fact, they make me sick.

I want to be clear here that I am not supporting Gamergate or making a point regarding whether or not every single member of that community is an upstanding citizen that is deserving of retribution.

I am sharing my story. As a woman who had no prior knowledge of this situation, or plans to reach out regarding it. I am sharing my story, as an entrepreneur who made a sincere attempt to take out an issue of cyber-bullying, and unintentionally happened upon what may be one of the darkest implications of the net we've seen to date.

That it is a business; that trolling and harassment is not only an unfortunate societal issue, but that it is a business that affects the bottomline of many people. That there are .orgs established because of it, that books deal are stricken regarding it, and that individuals are being propelled to fame as spokespersons on the exact same issue that they would never want to see nipped in the bud; because they feed it.

I cannot immediately assume how thick this cyber-industry runs. What I can tell you though is that if an *idea*—a mere 2 1/2 minute video that was on Kickstarter and being looked at by no one— incited a cyber war within 18 hours, then it is a business that has profit margins that would ripple through our economy if it came crashing down.

Indeed, we are looking at what may be the tip of an iceberg, and one that I am now for the first time, focused on exploring.

Beginning with Ms. Zoe Quinn and Randi Lee Harper.

Stay tuned...

Comments

Made with ♥ in NYC.

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